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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, August 14, 1935.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Vacation Bites." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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We're always hearing about the way insects spoil the crops. But sad experiences in my life have made me realize that insects can spoil many other good things beside crops -- summer vacations, for example, and holidays in the woods, fishing and camping trips, picnics, even outdoor meals in the backyard. For instance, now, do you remember the time you were looking forward to a lovely restful sleep in the cabin by the cool mountain lake, and instead, you spent the whole night in a battle against the mosquitoes? And, do you remember when you came back early from a fishing trip because ticks had already started making a meal of you? Then, do you recall that happy picnic in the woods when the youngsters came home covered with chigger bites?

But there. I'll go no further bringing up painful memories for fear you'll get the idea that I'm trying to scare you away from the great outdoors this summer. No such thing. My remarks today are dedicated to happier holidays and fewer bites. What I'm trying to prove is that when you answer the call of the wild, you can avoid trouble with these biting insects by taking some tips from the entomologists.

Let's begin with ways to foil the mosquito, since mosquitoes above all insects probably have the record as vacation-spoilers. Of course, you can take a vacation in localities in these United States that have no mosquitoes. If mosquitoes can't find any stagnant water as a breeding place, the tribe will just die out. I don't need to tell you that many places, once so thickly populated with mosquitoes that man could hardly survive, are now largely free from them, all because somebody got busy and destroyed the places where these pests breed. But I'm not going into details here about mosquito-eradication. That's a large-scale cooperative job which requires help from both the community and the individual. I'm just saying that you'll be lucky if you happen to take your vacation in a mosquitoless place.

But if you don't, you still have your choice of several good ways to avoid bites. In cottages and cabins, window and door screens of mesh so fine that even the smallest mosquito can't climb through are a great protection. That's a fact that most people understand nowadays. Then, if you're sleeping outdoors, you'll find the old-fashioned, mosquito-netting canopy over your bed as useful as ever. Beside this, you have your choice of anti-mosquito sprays that you can use to good advantage inside a cabin or cottage. Then you can use one of the various pungent liquids that mosquitoes avoid. No mosquito is likely to try to get familiar with any human being who is fragrant with citronella, camphor, pennyroyal, or cedar oil. A few drops of any one of these strong-smelling preparations on a towel hung at the head of your bed will keep the mosquito tribe at bay while you get some slumber.



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One of the most effective of all mosquito-repelling liquids is a mixture of several old remedies. Mix an ounce of citronella oil and an ounce of spirits of camphor with a half-ounce of cedar oil. That's a good preparation to take to camp, if you're likely to run into mosquitoes. If they are extra thick, you can rub this on your face and hands to good advantage.

The only trouble with any of these pungent preparations is that they lose their strength before morning. That's especially unfortunate in the Southern States where the yellow fever mosquito is about, because this insect has a habit of beginning to bite about daylight. "Came dawn." And came the mosquito. You see, at this hour in the early morning most people have begun to sleep very soundly and usually the odor of any anti-mosquito oil has passed away. Which means that the mosquito can take his meal undisturbed. To be safe, better apply more oil just before daylight.

In many pleasant vacation grounds especially in the east and along the coast the disreputable little gnats called "sand flies," punkies" or "no-see-ums" take the pleasure out of outdoor life and even enter porches and rooms in quest of blood. The Indian name "no-see-ums" is appropriate, as these insects are extremely small, so much so that they easily pass through an ordinary screen. Some kinds breed along the edges of salt marshes. In such cases control requires community effort. Other kinds breed along the edges of ponds and still others in rot-holes in trees. You can treat these holes with creosote oil or enlarge them so the water won't stand in them. Often, treating a few holes in trees in the yard will give marked relief. These gnats are attracted to lights so keeping the house dark also helps. You may need to use a repellent mixture on screens and on the hands and face.

So much for mosquitoes and sand flies. Now about another summer biter that makes a lot of trouble for many people who love the outdoors. This is the well-known chigger or red bug, so tiny that it is almost invisible. I say "well-known" but if you are a New Englander or a New Yorker and never stray far from home, you'll probably never experience a chigger bit, for these insects don't occur in the Northeast above southern Pennsylvania. And, since they like damp places, you won't find them in the desert or more arid parts of the country. They're thickest in the South. But you may also be troubled by them if you take your vacation in the Middle West as far north even as southern Minnesota and Wisconsin.

To avoid chiggers, keep the grass, underbrush and vines closely cut around your camp or cottage. And apply a very fine dusting sulphur to underbrush and ground with a dust gun, every two or three weeks. When you go off hiking through the woods, you'll find that leather leggings or high-top shoes over trousers will keep off many chiggers that would crawl up your legs. Then, dusting your body and underwear with sulphur dust or painting the top of your boots with kerosene will help. Chiggers have no appetite for either sulphur or kerosene. You can also save yourself bites by heading for the bathtub the moment you get home and taking a good scrub with a brush and strong soap to dislodge any mites that have already attached themselves to your skin.

If you want any further information on insects that are likely to annoy you on your vacation, you are you are welcome to write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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